

## **Graduate Sciences Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **GSP Hires**

#### **What happens once I am selected as a GSP?**

Successful candidates will be notified by phone and/or email by NOAA Workforce Management Office (WMO). The WMO representative will confirm the candidate's acceptance of the job offer. The WMO representative will verify your email account and mail the candidate a number of forms to be completed and returned at the swearing-in ceremony.

All GSP participants selected prior to May 2008 must participate in a one-week mandatory orientation program at the NOAA Silver Spring Metro Center Campus in Silver Spring, Maryland, during the last week of May. All participants are also required to attend the one-day NOAA new employee orientation where the participant will be sworn in as a Federal employee and meet with the GSP manager. All forms provided by WMO should be completed and brought to the swearing-in ceremony. NOAA will travel the participant to and from the orientations. Participants are also required to visit their organization for 2-3 days to meet their NOAA advisor to discuss the position for which they have been hired, performance requirements, research schedule, and to understand their work environment.

The NOAA support contractor, Minority Access, Inc., coordinates travel and hotel arrangements for the one-week mandatory Orientation Program held at the NOAA Auditorium in Silver Spring, Maryland. All flights arrive at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on the Sunday and Monday prior to the start of the orientation program. NOAA provides bus transportation on Sunday and Monday from the airport to hotels in Silver Spring, Maryland. NOAA pays for all pre-approved costs associated with the GSP participant's travel. Pre-approved taxi and metro fares are reimbursed when accompanied by the appropriate paperwork and receipts. A recipient who chooses to drive a personal vehicle to Silver Spring, Maryland, after receiving prior approval from NOAA will be reimbursed up to the cost of a round-trip airline ticket. Recipients are encouraged not to drive due to limited parking in Silver Spring, MD.

Bus transportation will be provided on the Saturday from the hotels to the airport after the orientation program concludes. The bus schedule will be provided in the welcome package each recipient receives prior to their arrival in Silver Spring.

The NOAA support contractor or NOAA will also coordinate travel and hotel arrangements for the swearing-in ceremony. The Swearing-in ceremony takes place on every other Monday.

#### **What is the purpose of the orientation?**

NOAA provides student scholars the opportunity to learn about the agency, meet senior managers, and understand the mission of the agency. NOAA organizations and selected staff offices present their research programs activities during the mandatory orientation program. In addition, NOAA organizations describe the types of projects that are/may be available for the summer internships.

During the mandatory orientation program, NOAA program staff presents more detailed information about the student scholarship programs including finding a summer internship, selecting a NOAA mentor, travel procedures, student scholar's and NOAA mentor's responsibilities, stipend payments, and meeting the administrative support contractor. Tours of NOAA facilities will be provided.

After the swearing-in ceremony, GSP participants obtain NOAA ID badges and meet with the GSP manager to review the Program Policy, sign the Continuity in Service Agreement, and receive NOAA E-mail accounts (which will be used for all official electronic communication between the GSP participant and NOAA after orientation).

After the Orientation, the GSP participants travel to their NOAA organization to meet with their supervisor and colleagues and have the opportunity to understand housing and transportation needs during the annual 16 week required training period.

### **What happens if I miss the orientation?**

Successful applicants who miss the orientation will be invited to attend the orientation the following year. However, all successful candidates must attend a swearing-in ceremony to be a GSP participant. Every effort is made to have all GSP participants sworn in on the same day, and to give GSP participants the opportunity to meet their colleagues and the GSP Program Manager.

### **What is the dress code for the orientation program?**

During the orientation program GSP participants are required to dress in business casual attire. There are photo opportunities with NOAA senior staff that may appear on NOAA websites, in video clips and print media, brochures, etc. Examples of business casual attire include:

#### **For Males:**

Sports jackets  
Slacks (dress and Khaki)  
Shirts with collars  
Ties

#### **For Females:**

Suits  
Skirts, slacks and blouses  
Sweaters  
Dresses

The dress code on tours is casual (sneakers, jeans, t-shirts, etc).

At no time are cut-off jeans, shirts or blouses displaying midriffs, micro/mini skirts or flip flops appropriate.

**When will I start receiving financial benefits?**

GSP participants begin to receive tuition, housing, and other program benefits at the start of the Fall 2008 academic year.

**What if I am not selected until September or October – when will I begin receiving financial benefits?**

GSP participants who are selected after the start of the Fall 2008 academic year will be eligible to receive benefits once as they are sworn into Federal service.

**How does NOAA ensure students are enrolled full-time at a university?**

At the start of each term GSP participants are required to submit their course schedule and university issued certification of enrollment to NOAA and the support contractor to ensure full-time status.

**Can I transfer to another University after I enter the GSP?**

Yes, if a GSP participant transfers to another university, NOAA and the support contractor must be notified in writing prior to the transfer to obtain approval for continued participation. If a GSP transfers to another university, their degree must still be completed within 2 years for a Masters and 4 years for a PhD from the time of the swearing-in ceremony.

**What if I am selected and my research area does not match NOAA – will I be required to change my research?**

Each GSP is selected for the program based on his/her area of research in relation to the NOAA sciences. Each GSP participant is required to have a NOAA employee serve as a member of his/her thesis/dissertation committee. Therefore, the GSP will be matched with a NOAA employee who is experienced with the participant's area of research.

**What happens if I don't complete my degree when planned?**

The established training period may be extended up to a maximum of one year (in six month intervals) after consultation with the GSP Manager and upon the recommendation of the NOAA supervisor and academic advisor to allow for extenuating circumstances (i.e. family or personal medical emergencies they require extended absence from school and/or suspension of research work). The decision to amend a training plan will be made only after taking into consideration the trainee's current program progress and ability to progress at an accelerated pace.

Every quarter, the GSP participant is required to submit a Quarterly Report summarizing their progress towards degree completion and a timeline. Any anticipated extension to the training period need to be documented through the Quarterly Reports.

**Will I be paid for attending orientation?**

GSP participants do not receive a salary for attending the orientation unless they have already been sworn in to Federal service. However, all approved travel costs are included for the orientation. GSP participants will receive per diem to cover meals during the orientation travel.

### **Are my GSP benefits subject to taxes?**

NOAA recommends that all GSP participants contact a tax professional to determine tax obligations of the program benefits.

### **What is the process of obtaining a NOAA ID Badge?**

The NOAA ID Badge is required to enter all NOAA facilities. Therefore, scholarship recipients must adhere to Federal Security Procedures to obtain a NOAA ID Badge. This includes:

Complete the applicant TRAINING located at:  
<http://www.osec.doc.gov/tsy/HSPD12/Applicants.htm>.

Enter your full legal name and contact information - use your NOAA EMAIL account for email address.

Under Status with the Department of Commerce, select "I am an employee"

For Duty Station – your Duty station will be provided to you at the time of notification of acceptance to the program

For Bureau/Office, select "NOAA"

Under Sponsor information, enter the following:

Sponsor's First Name: Priti

Sponsor's Last Name: Brahma

Sponsor's email: Priti.Brahma@noaa.gov

Sponsor's phone number: (301) 713-9437

Click "NEXT" to complete the Training,

Do not hit "submit" until you print the certificate indicating course completion. Once you hit "submit" you cannot go back to print the certificate. Therefore, be sure to print the certificate first.

Push the "submit" button - if the training has been successfully completed, users will be directed to the Department of Commerce security homepage, indicating that this portion is complete.

Complete the Personal Identity Verification (PIV) Request Form (Form CD-591), answering questions 5 through 9. Do not fill in any other questions on this form. This form will be provided during the swearing-in ceremony.

Complete the Declaration for Federal Employment (Form 306), sign as an applicant. This form will be provided during the swearing-in ceremony.

Complete the Name and Social Security Number fields on the Request for Security Services Form (Form 65-8). This form will be provided during the swearing-in ceremony.

Make a photocopy of two forms of picture identification such as your driver's license, passport and/or college ID card.

Compile a one page resume.

Bring your resume, the applicant training certificate and the copy of 2 forms of picture ID to the swearing-in ceremony.

**During the summer prior to beginning school, what health benefits are available?**

As soon as the GSP participant is sworn into Federal Service, they are eligible to enroll in one of the Federal Government's Health plans. Information about the Federal Employee Health Benefits including plans and costs are available at: <http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/>. This information will also be reviewed during the swearing-in ceremony.

**May I negotiate salary? How will my pay grade be determined?**

Salaries are not negotiable. Students entering the program with a Bachelor's Degree are hired at the GS-7 level or equivalent. Upon completion of a Master's degree, participants are promoted to a GS-9 level or equivalent.

Participants entering the program having completed the Master's degree and/or advanced to candidacy will be hired at the GS-9 level or equivalent. At the completion of the PhD, participants are promoted to a GS-11 level or equivalent.

**When will I receive a salary?**

GSP Participants receive a salary while in a work-status at their duty station or while on official travel (conferences, field research, etc.)

**If do not live on campus, am I eligible for a meal allowance?**

Campus housing refers to the place of residence while attending courses full-time and while not in a full-time work status. Therefore, GSP participants who are attending school full-time to complete their coursework requirements are eligible for the meal allowance even if living off campus.

**If I am on the quarter system, how will my meal allowance be distributed?**

Meal allowances in the amount of \$3000.00 are distributed up to two times per year, once at the start of the Fall term, and the second during January.

**My University has an online system for tuition bills and payment. Therefore, there is no paper invoicing. How do I provide an invoice to NOAA for reimbursement?**

NOAA provides payment of tuition directly to the University. Electronic invoices may be submitted to the GSP Manager.

**How do I pay for books?**

Each participant is allowed to purchase books for corresponding course work and research during their training period. Books may be purchased at the campus bookstore, over the internet or from sources other than the campus bookstore. NOAA will reimburse the participant for preapproved purchase of books after receiving proof of purchase. As an alternative, NOAA may purchase books if participants provide the complete book selection information including title, copyright year, edition, and website to the GSP program manager at least one week prior to requiring the book.

**Is there a mechanism for NOAA to directly pay my campus housing? Is there mechanism to pay housing in advance?**

NOAA does not directly pay for housing. NOAA authorizes reimbursements to participants from the support contractor. Participants receive a campus housing allowance while attending classes on campus as a full-time student. In order to receive the housing allowance, each month the GSP participant must submit a copy of the front and back of the canceled rent payment check to the GSP Manager for reimbursement. Students are required to submit all housing reimbursement requests to NOAA within 60 days of payment of the housing fee. Housing reimbursement requests received after 60 days will not be honored.

### **Will NOAA pay for housing if I live with a spouse/roommate?**

Participants receive a campus housing allowance while attending classes on campus as a full-time student. To receive this reimbursement ALL participants are required to fax a copy of their Lease Agreement signed by the landlord and participant within two weeks of their enter-on-duty date to EPP. The participant will be reimbursed for an amount up to the average cost of a one (1) Bedroom unit in the local area of their university. Participants who share housing are only eligible to receive reimbursement for the percentage of rent stated on the Lease Agreement equivalent to their percentage of living space.

### **What is covered in the housing allowance?**

As part of the campus housing allowance, participants are eligible to receive reimbursement for utilities costs while attending classes on campus in a full-time student status. Utilities include water, gas, and electricity service when these services are not part of the lease agreement. Participants requesting reimbursement of utilities must provide copies of the utility services which have been billed directly in the participant's name. Participants who share housing will only receive reimbursement for a percentage of the utilities bills equivalent to their percentage of living space. Cable, internet, telephone, and lawn service are not eligible for the housing allowance.

### **Are GSP students reimbursed for expenses accrued during the change in locations from school to the duty station and return?**

To complete the 640 hour work requirement, participants will be traveled by NOAA roundtrip to their duty station during their winter, spring and summer breaks.

Participants will be relocated to their duty station upon completion of all coursework. NOAA will pay for a one-time permanent change of station (PCS) move for the participant. To begin the PCS process, participants should contact the EPP Administrative Support Staff at least 60 days prior to the expected move date.

### **Will NOAA pay for the entire cost of my move?**

As a student trainee, GSP participants are eligible to receive the following moving expenses: commercial transportation or mileage allowance for the GSP participant and immediate family; per diem en route for the GSP participant; transportation of GSP participant's household goods; temporary storage of GSP participant's household goods; and transportation of the GSP participant's mobile home.



**After I complete the GSP and go to work full-time as a NOAA employee, what happens? What is my commitment to NOAA, if any?**

Upon completion of the graduate degree, the participant is promoted to a GS-9 level equivalent (Master's) or a GS-11 level equivalent (Ph.D.). Once the promotion is effective, the participant is transferred to their Line Office where they become a full-time employee of their Line Office.

Every GSP participant is required to work for the Federal government for 3 years for every 1 year of financial support received from NOAA. For example, a participant in a 2 year Master's program would be required to work for 6 years for the Federal government if the participant received financial support from NOAA for the full duration of their program.